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Things To Do In Michigan During The Summer

By Sharon Stajda

Michigan's growing, problematic financial future, including the decline in automotive industry jobs

(not to mention the higher cost of fuel), spells financial insecurity for many Michigan families, making it harder to afford long-distance vacations and high-priced recreational activities enjoyed so much in the past. This has led me to wonder, "How do we entertain ourselves and our families and fully enjoy summer break for less money? Better yet, how do we support Michigan's economy in these tough economic times?" By enjoying the grass (and water) in our own backyard and partaking in all that our state has to offer.

I have compiled a list of activities that won't break the bank, and will provide interesting ways to have some fun close to home this summer.

1. Museums. When was the last time you visited a museum? Michigan has wonderful world-class Museums from art to science to history. Standouts include the Detroit Institute of Art (did you know that it is the fifth-largest fine arts museum in the country?), and the Grand Rapids Art Museum. The Detroit Science Center is geared to kids, and offers a host of family-friendly exhibits and galleries, not to mention the astonishing sensory experience of the museum's IMAX dome theater. Your kids will thank you. Michigan.org is a great resource for finding these museums.

2. Lighthouses. Michigan has more lighthouses than any other state. Bordered by the Great Lakes, the sheer multitude of these historic gems mean they have become an icon for our state, and their tall, slender columns grace everything from our shorelines to picturesque wall calendars. These lighthouses - many of which have been renovated and some which have become public museums - continue to educate and serve as a reminder of our state's grand maritime history. Don't miss the opportunity to visit them! If nothing else, you and your family will be treated to nature's grand brushstrokes of a sweeping, maritime landscape.

3. Beaches. With our abundant coastline, beaches are everywhere in Michigan and easy to love during the humid, late summer months. Some beaches are better than others, and so it's important to pick the right one. From personal experience, southwest Michigan and northwest Michigan truly offers some of the best beach experiences. South Haven (the magnificent century-old lighthouse still stands at the

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end of south pier), Grand Haven, St. Joseph, and the Traverse City / Leland areas are home to remarkable beaches. Long stretches of soft, white sand, clean, blue water for swimming and boating, and quaint, lively towns brimming with restaurants, shops, and ice cream parlors make these required destinations!

4. Parks. Take advantage of the many well-maintained and diverse Michigan Metro Parks. Pack a picnic lunch for the day, and don't forget to pack the s'mores. These wonderful chocolate, marshmallow, gram cracker treats are a must-bring for a Michigander's picnic feast.

The Michigan Metro Parks provide a myriad of family-fun activities, including swimming, paddle boating, fishing, and loads of scenic picnic settings. And most have paved and wooded trails, making them ideal for hiking, biking, roller blading, and bird watching. Plan to take bats and a ball for a friendly baseball game.

5. Festivals. Michigan offers a variety of outdoor summer festivals which draw people from all walks of life and from all corners of the state; from the cultural (Ann Arbor Arts Fair) to heritage festivals (Holland's Tulip Time) to national extravaganzas (Traverse City's National Cherry Festival), and everything in between. Most Michigan communities will host some form of festival throughout the summer months. For a complete list, go to Michigan.org.

6. Produce Picking - Take Your Pick! I can't say enough about the produce grown here in Michigan. Across the state, and especially on the west and northwest sides, abundant crops of blueberries, tart cherries, strawberries, peaches, apples and grapes are grown each year. The fruits are then sold at various farmers markets and roadside stands throughout the state. There is nothing like eating farm-fresh fruit (or vegetables for that matter). The sweetness and flavor of the produce is far superior to anything found in your grocery aisle. And since it's grown locally, it's fresh!

For the novelty and experience, visit a local fruit farm and pick your own cherries, blueberries, and the like for use now and in the colder months ahead. Bring along the family; children always get a kick out of picking their own fruit and dropping them into pails! It also gives them an appreciation and respect for nature and God's beautiful creation.

After the harvest, have the family participate in baking something delectable and sweet. Cobblers, crisps, and shortcakes always satisfy during the hot summer months. Or, teach kids to can or package & freeze the fruit for the months ahead (bubbling, tart cherry pies always seem to hit the spot when the weather turns cool).

And one last word of advice: Save the fruit pits! You can have your very own fruit tree if you wrap the pits in moist paper towels until they start to spawn seedlings, and then transfer them to your own back yard!

7. Gardening. Gardening is a great outdoor activity that the whole family can become involved in. The wonderful Michigan summer weather provides optimal planting conditions. It does not matter what size garden you decide to plant – a large vegetable garden or an oversized container garden – it can be very rewarding for the whole family to share in the planting and harvesting of a garden.

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To get started, make a trip to the local library and get some good books on the subject. Then, plan your garden – just what kind of plants to plant, and where? Time to visit the nursery to purchase your plants. Get the whole family involved in choosing just the right plants. Make sure everyone has a hand in the planting and caring for the new garden. You may be surprised just how rewarding gardening can be.

8. Family Cookouts. Get family and friends together for a pot luck or backyard barbeque. Plan some fun games for the kids, as well as the adults. Have everyone bring a dish. You will have a virtual feast.

If cooking for yourself and immediate family, find a new and challenging recipe. Experiment with using fresh herbs from the garden to add an earthy, pungent flavor to your meals. Or – next time you're doing the grocery shopping – give exotic fruits and vegetables a try. My family is partial to sliced mangos, and this fruit pairs especially well with Mexican-inspired fish tacos. Cooking something new can provide not only an activity, but a tasty reward for all who partake in the meal.

9. Scavenger Hunts. Whatever happened to the old-time scavenger hunt? Organize a weekend scavenger hunt with friends. Plan and place your clues, and get that old competitive spirit out, and play

to win!

10. Exercise. Get out and start that outdoor exercise program you have been promising yourself since New Year's Eve. Walk, jog, bike, whatever...Just get out and "do it"! Head into fall with a leaner, more revitalized "you".

11. Crafts. Crafting can add hours of fun for adults and kids alike. Visit a near by Craft store – you will be sure to find many exciting crafting projects for you and your children. Or, you might just have something lying around the house to inspire the imagination. For instance, polish the dust off a collection of miscellaneous seashells and glue them to flower pots, mirrors, unpainted furniture, and wooden boxes to create exquisite nautical treasures. Embellish with sea glass and milky-green coats of paint. The sky's the limit!

Knitting is also a great craft, and easy to learn. Nowadays, there are so many scrumptious textures and colors of yarn, and so many unique patterns, that knitting as we know it has been completely revitalized! Spend a few afternoon hours teaching a child the rewards of making and wearing something made from the heart and the hands.

12. Reading. Reading can be a luxury for some. People leading hectic, stressful lifestyles may want to just sit back and catch up on some reading. Take that special book out of doors; your yard, the beach, or a great shady park. You might be surprised how much that outdoor setting can make it all the more relaxing.

Speaking of settings, I can't think of a more appropriate summer book to read than "Gift from the Sea" by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. This poetic piece was written half a century ago by Charles Lindbergh's wife. Her meditations on life, love, solitude and contentment are made against the oceanic backdrop of Captiva Island (before the loads of tourists) and a tiny, weathered beach cabin. Her muse? None other than the tiny seashells she collected from the beach outside her cabin door. Truly a soul-inspiring read.

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I have provided just a few activities that won't break the bank. Yet these activities will still provide some fun times for you and your loved ones this summer while also supporting Michigan's economy. Just use your imagination, and I am sure you can come up with many more fun activities that will provide some wonderful summer memories for you, your family and friends.

Sharon Stajda has been lifelong resident of Michigan. For further information on two great Michigan cities to visit – Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, visit the following urls:

<http://www.oldandsold.com/articles16/american-travel-10.shtml>

<http://www.oldandsold.com/articles16/american-travel-9.shtml>

Michigan Schools Improve High School Graduation Requirements

By Patricia Hawke

Michigan Schools presented its new high school graduation requirements -- the Michigan Merit Curriculum -- in December 2005. The Michigan schools are determined to better prepare students for work and college success, by assuring that all students have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed.

Previous requirements for graduation in the Michigan schools reflected an economy and society that no longer exist, nor did they represent the real world demands of work and college. Michigan schools skills and course subjects that were once optional for students after graduation now are essential to enter college or the workforce. In a 2005 survey, only 24 percent of the graduates said they were significantly challenged during high school, while a recent survey showed one-in-five graduates thought expectations were low and it was easy to "slide by". National data indicate that academic achievement in high school reading, mathematics and science has been mostly stagnate for decades.

Michigan's Governor Jennifer M. Granholm backs the new Michigan schools program, stating that the state's economy will suffer if Michigan does not have a highly educated workforce. Her goal is to double the number of college graduates in Michigan, and the new Michigan schools high school graduation requirements will ensure the goal is met.

The new Michigan Merit Curriculum requires Michigan schools graduates to successfully complete both the Michigan Merit Core and the 21st Century Learning Core. The new Michigan Merit Core consists of the following coursework:

- English Language Arts, integrated Humanities sequence, or CTE sequence -- 4 credits
- Mathematics -- 4 credits with one credit each in Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, AND an additional mathematics or mathematics-related credit in the senior year, integrated mathematics sequence, or CTE sequence
- Science -- 3 credits with one credit each in Biology, Physics or Chemistry, and one additional credit

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of science, integrated math sequence, or CTE sequence

- Social Sciences — 3 credits
- Civics and Economics — 5 credits
- U.S. History and World History — 1 credit each, integrated with Geography, integrated Humanities sequence, or CTE sequence
- World Languages — 2 credits
- Health and Physical Education — 2 credits
- Visual and Performing Arts — 1 credit

Additionally, students in their junior year must take the Michigan schools' Michigan Merit Exam or the alternate MI-ACCESS assessment exam. Those who do not pass in their junior year have another opportunity to take the exam in the spring of their senior year. Additionally, the Michigan schools are developing high school content expectations to serve as a guide to curriculum development for the school districts.

The Michigan schools new graduation requirements instill rigor into the high school coursework, but provides some flexibility for school district phase-in of the new requirements and student modification provisions in some limited situations. The new Michigan schools requirements begin with the freshman class in the fall of 2006.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Michigan schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Michigan/index.html>



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